than 200 people standed in zero area along Indo-Bangladesh border since the 31st January, 2003; and

(b) if so, their reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes.

(b) Our serious concern over the 213 Bangladeshi nationals standed along the zero line was conveyed to the Bangladesh High Commissioner on 3rd February, 2003. The External Affairs Minister also discussed the matter with the bangladesh Foreign Minister on 5th February, 2003 on telephone. Following these diplomatic efforts, the Bangladesh authorities allowed the 213 Bangladeshi nationals stranded along the zero line to reenter their territory on the night of 5th February, 2003.

Setting up of a crisis management group on Iraq war

3026. SHRI DATTA MEGHE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have set up a crisis management group to deal with the evolving situation in Iraq specifically its implications for Indian nationals living in the Gulf:

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the Indians living in Iraq and other Gulf countries have been given protection by various Indian High Commissions in those countries; and

(d) if so,the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) to (b) An Inter-ministerial Crisis Management Committee has been set up in the Ministry of External Affairs to closely monitor the impact of the war in Iraq on India and the Indian community in the Gulf countries. The committee has been meeting regularly since 17th March.

(c) to (d) The Indian Missions in the Gulf countries have been actively overseeing the welfare of the Indian communities in those countries. The Missions in Kuwait and Riyadh have set up control rooms to answer queries and give guidance on a 24-hour basis.

Government role during Iraq War

†3027. SHRI P.K. MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what has been the role of Government during the U.S. attack on Iraq;

(b) whether it is a fact that the diplomatic atmosphere in New Delhi has been cool in spite of such a big incident; and

(c) Government's future strategy in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Government had expressed its deepest anguish at the commencement of the U.S. military operations in Iraq, which lacked justification and was avoidable. Government is concerned about the humanitarian situation in Iraq and has called on the international community to begin large-scale effort to alleviate the human suffering in Iraq and has offered India's help in this regard. Though not a member of United Nations Security Council, India has participated in the Open Meetings of the Security Council, including on 26 March, 2003.

(b) No.

(c) Government will continue to be guided by its national interest, the need for early cesation of hostilities and restoration of peace in the region, the importance of preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and the urgency of addressing the humanitarian situation in Iraq. Government is also prepared to respond to the welfare and security needs of the Indian community living in the Gulf region.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.